HMIE | His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland
Luchd-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlam ann an Alba

Primary school inspection findings for academic year 2024 to 2025

A summary of findings

Introduction

This report presents the main findings from primary school inspections carried out by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) in academic year 2024 to 2025. This report does not include evidence from nursery classes.

His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) carried out 196 inspections, of which:

- 96 were full model inspections
- 100 were short model inspections
- 20 of the 196 schools required a further inspection

HMI carried out 40 further inspections, from which 24 required no further engagement.

HM Inspectors carried out inspections in primary schools using quality indicators from How good is our school and associated inspection guidance. The report draws on evidence from inspection visits, professional dialogue and pre-inspection questionnaires. This represents an approximate 10% sample of all primary schools.

HMIE has a statutory duty to inspect and report on the quality of education and outcomes for learners in Scotland under the Education (Scotland) Act 2025. This sector level summary provides an overview of strengths, areas for improvement and patterns identified through inspection activity during the year.

Inspection findings

Overall, inspection evidence shows a primary sector with many important strengths, alongside clear priorities for further improvement.

Positive relationships are a notable strength in almost all primary schools. Children learn in inclusive, nurturing environments. They behave well and demonstrate respect for adults and other children. In most schools, staff demonstrate a deep understanding of the importance of improving children's wellbeing. They understand the link between wellbeing and readiness to learn. Teachers make increasingly effective use of resources, learning spaces and outdoor environments to enhance engagement and support high-quality learning.

Across Scotland, play-based learning in primary one is widely recognised as important. However, the implementation of play pedagogy remains variable and at an early stage in many schools. Where play-based learning is working well children benefit from an appropriate balance of child-led and adult-initiated experiences.

Staff leadership is a growing strength nationally. In most schools, teachers and support staff take on leadership roles linked to improvement priorities, supported by collegiate working. Positively, children's leadership is an emerging strength nationally. There is a continued focus on widening participation and aligning pupil-led initiatives to improvement priorities. Children increasingly influence school improvement through pupil voice groups, committees and leadership roles.

Teachers routinely use literacy and numeracy progression pathways well to support continuity and secure progression. However, progression across other curricular areas is not always planned for. Progression pathways need to support high-quality experiences for children to develop skills progressively and meaningfully, building upon prior learning across all areas of the curriculum.

Primary education in Scotland is characterised by strong leadership, inclusive culture and positive relationships. The priorities moving forward are to secure greater consistency in high-quality learning and teaching, strengthen the strategic use of data, and ensure improvement activity leads to clear, measurable impact on children's outcomes.

Leadership of change

Values-based leadership and positive school culture are notable strengths across the sector. School visions, values and aims are well developed and widely understood by staff and children. Children are actively engaged in shaping and articulating them.

Across almost all schools, senior leaders create nurturing, inclusive learning environments underpinned by shared values and positive relationships. Children's voices are increasingly influential in decision making. In the strongest practice, values underpin improvement planning and daily interactions, contributing to high levels of trust, collaboration and wellbeing across school communities.

Across the majority of primary schools, headteachers and senior leaders provide strong, strategic leadership. This creates a positive, collaborative culture and drives improvement. Where leadership is most effective, senior leaders articulate a clear plan for continuous improvement and build trusting relationships with staff, children and families. However, in a minority of schools, the pace of improvement is negatively impacted by a lack of strategic direction. In these schools, greater clarity of direction, more robust use of data and stronger quality assurance processes are needed to inform and accelerate improvement.

Staff leadership is a growing strength nationally. There is a continued focus on building staff capacity to lead improvement. In most primary schools, staff engage enthusiastically in professional learning. Where practice is strongest, professional learning is systematic, collaborative and closely aligned to school priorities.

Practitioner enquiry is increasingly used in primary schools to test and measure the impact of new approaches. Through practitioner enquiry, teachers are increasingly engaging in educational research to inform their practice. In a few cases, leadership roles remain concentrated among a small number of teachers, limiting capacity for sustained improvement.

Children's leadership is an emerging strength nationally. There is a continued focus on widening participation and aligning pupil-led initiatives to improvement priorities. Children are increasingly influential in school improvement through pupil voice groups, committees and leadership roles.

Where practice is strongest, structured groups have clear action plans that are closely aligned with school priorities. These successful approaches build children's confidence, leadership and decision-making skills.

A few schools, however, offer limited or inconsistent opportunities for children to influence or lead change. In these schools, opportunities are often not linked to school improvement priorities, are too focused on older children and provide fewer opportunities for younger children to engage meaningfully.

Learning, teaching and assessment

Overall, primary schools demonstrate a strong commitment to establishing and maintaining positive relationships and well–established children's rights approaches. Children feel respected and valued and have meaningful opportunities to influence decision-making. In the majority of schools, children demonstrate positive behaviour, motivation and a strong sense of pride in their school communities.

The quality of learning environments is generally positive, with most children engaged and motivated in their learning and play. Creative approaches, outdoor learning and digital technologies are increasingly used well across the sector. However, consistency in the quality of learning and teaching remains a significant challenge.

In a minority of schools, variability in pace, challenge, skilled questioning and differentiation limits children's progress. This variation highlights the need for a more consistent shared understanding of highly effective pedagogy in primary schools. Achieving greater consistency in highly effective learning and teaching remains a significant priority.

In the majority of primary schools, teachers make effective use of formative, summative, diagnostic and standardised assessments to support their judgement on progress and attainment. These are often embedded within well-structured assessment calendars.

The majority of teachers engage in moderation within and beyond their schools, leading to improved confidence and accuracy in professional judgements in literacy and numeracy. While this approach strengthens teacher judgement, teachers need to improve their use of this assessment information to inform short- and medium-term planning for learning. Senior leaders and staff should build on this to strengthen further the links between planning, assessment and learning.

Senior leaders and teachers engage in regular, structured discussions to review assessment data, identify individual children's needs, and plan timely, targeted interventions. These approaches support improved progress and attainment particularly for children requiring additional support or challenge.

Learning pathways

The majority of schools use literacy and numeracy progression pathways well to support teachers to plan learning that helps children build on prior knowledge and skills. However, progression in other curricular areas is less well developed. This limits the breadth and depth of learning across the curriculum. Strengthening the strategic oversight and consistent use of progression frameworks across the curriculum remains a priority to secure high-quality learning for children across all curricular areas.

The majority of schools plan learning across different subjects effectively, creating meaningful and engaging contexts linked to real–life themes, sustainability, local heritage and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). In these schools, personalisation, choice and skills development is evident. Whilst planning in this area is an increasing strength, further work is needed to ensure consistent, progressive planning that deepens learning and supports the application of children's skills across the curriculum.

Parental engagement

Partnerships with parents and families are generally strong and characterised by positive relationships, effective communication and high levels of trust. Parents consistently state that staff are approachable, supportive and know their children well. In the majority of schools, parental engagement is contributing positively to the ethos of the school. To build on this, some schools now need to evaluate more clearly the impact of parental engagement on learning, attainment and wellbeing. Senior leaders need to involve parents more fully in improvement planning.

Active and engaged Parent Councils are a particular feature of Scottish primary schools. Parent Councils play an important role in supporting school life and reducing barriers to participation. Overall, parents feel well-informed about the work of their Parent Council. Senior leaders often share plans for Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) and school improvements through this forum. They should build on this positive partnership to support Parent Councils to be empowered to inform and support impactful school improvement.

Improving wellbeing, equality and inclusion

A commitment to improve children's wellbeing is a strong feature nationally. Staff know children well and demonstrate care and kindness in their interactions. They strive to create nurturing, inclusive environments where children feel safe, included, respected and supported.

Most staff demonstrate a deep understanding of their school communities and use targeted approaches effectively to support children's wellbeing, equality and inclusion. Staff apply nurturing, trauma-informed and rights-based approaches consistently well, supported by strong partnership working.

Staff demonstrate a strong understanding of statutory duties relating to safeguarding, wellbeing, equality and inclusion. This is supported by regular professional learning. Whilst statutory duties are largely well met, some schools need greater consistency in the use of wellbeing data and more precise, measurable targets for children requiring additional support.

In the majority of schools, diversity is valued and celebrated. Children, staff and stakeholders report feeling treated fairly and justly. Where approaches are well-developed, children discuss issues relating to protected characteristics and celebrate differences. Senior leaders should now strengthen the curriculum to ensure that children have well-planned opportunities to learn about diversity and develop skills to identify and challenge discrimination and prejudice.

Raising attainment and achievement

The majority of schools maintain good attainment in literacy and numeracy. Teachers' professional judgement on achievement of a level continues to improve through increased moderation and strengthened understanding of national Benchmarks.

Where practice is strongest, senior leaders and staff use robust tracking systems and a wide range of assessment data to monitor progress, identify gaps and implement targeted interventions. Systematic processes provide accurate overviews of progress for individuals, groups and cohorts. Tracking across other curricular areas is less developed, with many schools at an early stage of implementation.

A minority of schools continue to face challenges in evidencing progress over time. In these schools, a lack of robust, evidence-based professional judgement contributes to fluctuations in attainment data. Their attainment data is not consistently reliable or sufficiently robust to inform planning or measure the impact of interventions.

In the majority of schools, targeted interventions are a strong feature of approaches to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy. Staff use assessment data well to identify gaps in learning and implement timely, targeted support. Senior leaders and teachers plan targeted strategies, including literacy and numeracy programmes, small-group work and personalised supports. This is helping children make good or very good progress from prior levels of attainment.

In most schools, children achieve well and develop skills for learning, life and work across a range of experiences. These experiences are frequently linked to the 4 capacities of Curriculum for Excellence and are embedded within the ethos and life of the school. Senior leaders and staff are making good progress in tracking children's participation in achievement opportunities and are increasingly recognising the importance of linking these to skills development.

Staff in almost all schools have a strong understanding of the social and economic circumstances of their communities. They are aware of the challenges families face and use this well to inform decision-making. In many schools, community involvement and partnership working to improve children's outcomes is a strength. Effective collaboration with community groups, charities, and local organisations provides valuable opportunities for children's leadership, cultural engagement and achievement.

In a minority of schools, staff need to strengthen how they measure and evidence the impact of interventions to narrow identified attainment gaps. Senior leaders in a few schools should improve evaluation processes, aligning PEF spending more closely with strategies to raise attainment and close the poverty related attainment gap.

Five essential points

Values-based leadership and positive school culture are widespread

In most schools, senior leaders demonstrate strong, values-led leadership with a clear focus on improving wellbeing. This values-based approach supports nurturing, inclusive environments and builds trust and collaboration across school communities.

Teaching quality is inconsistent

Learning environments are generally engaging and inclusive, but teaching quality is inconsistent.

While most children are motivated and benefit from increasing creativity, outdoor learning and access to digital technology, variability in pace, challenge, questioning and differentiation is limiting learning and progress in a minority of schools.

Wellbeing, inclusion and equality are strongly embedded

Wellbeing, inclusion and equality are strongly embedded, with some gaps in data use and target-setting.

Staff typically understand children's needs well and use nurturing, trauma-informed and rights-based approaches. Some schools need more consistent use of wellbeing data and more measurable targets for children who require additional support with their learning and wellbeing.

Assessment and tracking are improving but need more rigour

Assessment and tracking are improving but need more rigour and broader coverage beyond literacy and numeracy.

Moderation is strengthening teacher judgement, but some schools still need to improve the quality of attainment data and ensure that they are using it more consistently. Some schools need to strengthen approaches to assessment and tracking across the wider curriculum.

Partnerships with parents and communities are a strength

Relationships and communication are generally strong (including Parent Councils), though some schools need to evaluate the impact of partnership working more systematically and involve parents more directly in improvement planning and evaluation.

Inspection terms of quantity

The following standard terms of quantity are used in this report:

Term	Percentage range
All	100%
Almost all	91% to 99%
Most	75% to 90%
Majority	50% to 74%
Minority/ less than half	15% to 49%
A few	15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.